

**STAINES ARE
LET OFF
LIGHTLY!**

WYCOMBE WANDERERS missed the chance to extend their lead at the top of the Rothmans Isthmian League table to five points on Tuesday night when they were held to a 1-1 draw at Staines. And the Blues must know full well that the game was their's for the taking.

The new Division One leaders should have had this excellent game of football sewn up long before the final whistle but they missed chance after chance to let Staines off the hook. Without exaggeration, Wanderers had at least 70 per cent of the game, but in the end had to be satisfied with a share of the spoils which leaves them three points ahead at the top.

Architect of much of Wycombe's fine football was Gavin Fraser, who made a welcome return to the side in midfield. Gavin is tied to Borough Road College and was only able to play on Tuesday because he is on half term holiday. He soon made a big impression by using the ball intelligently in midfield and despite his slight frame, winning several 50-50 situations by sheer effort. It's a shame Wycombe can't have his services more regularly.

Fraser's availability meant Paul Birdseye returned to his best position at full back while Dave Bullock moved to sub. The switch certainly strengthened the defence and the back four looked as solid and efficient as it has all season. Once again the centre backs, Keith Mead and Alan Phillips, stood out while Bobby Davies is improving with every game.

It was particularly pleasing to see the defence playing the ball carefully and accurately out of defence to build attacks rather than booting the ball upfield. The Blues mounted many raids that emanated from the back four. The midfield men deserve credit too, for they had the better of the exchanges in their department.

Any blame for dropping two points then, should rest on the shoulders of the forwards. They were given and also created themselves, a string of scoring opportunities but could convert only one. One goal from over eight chances is not really good enough.

HECTIC TIME

Of the front three Howard Kettleborough was most impressive. He gave former Wanderer Rob Williams a hectic time in the air and on the ground while his clever flicks and nudges found his two front colleagues time and again. But neither Ian Pearson nor Dylan Evans were really at their best and although Pearson again showed he has clever close control, he tended to keep the ball too long.

A thick mist hung over the ground before the kick off and it was only just possible to see the far side of the ground. But referee Gordon, who had a fine game, decided play was possible and the fog soon lifted.

The Blues started at a blistering pace and soon had Staines

Staines Town 1, Wycombe Wanderers 1 REPORT BY STUART EARP

back pedalling. After only three minutes Birdseye and Evans combined on the right to set up a shooting chance for Kennedy but the ball hit goalkeeper Frank Parsons' body.

SUPERIOR SIDE

Wanderers continued to look the superior side in all departments and their smooth inter-passing, not easy on a slippery surface that became boggy in the middle, began to cause Staines all sorts of problems. The home side were forced to reply with breakaways usually spearheaded by the talented John Ritchie.

The referee found out just how difficult the surface was when he collapsed in the middle of the field, but he was able to continue after treatment from both trainers. The crowd were most unsympathetic!

Wycombe hit the woodwork twice in the match, the first occasion coming after 25 minutes. Pearson, who tormented Brendan O'Sullivan early on with his ball control, caught the defence totally square when he ran onto Birdseye's curling through ball. Ian turned inside a defender and the goalkeeper but his left foot shot struck the base of the far upright.

Staines replied with a fine move that Ritchie wasted by blasting high over the bar — a feat that Kennedy repeated from

a free kick on the edge of the box soon afterwards.

The body of Parsons again foiled Wanderers after 37 minutes when Kettleborough set up a chance for Evans, but two further escapes emphasised that this was not to be Wycombe's night. A minute before half time Kennedy failed to get full power behind a good chance and seconds later Parsons went full length to stop an Evans drive from 20 yards.

SCRAMBLE

But the Blues seemed undisturbed about the fortunes in front of goal and kept plugging away. Evans began the new half with a volley just wide and then Williams booted the ball over his own crossbar to relieve the pressure after a goalmouth scramble.

Under such pressure it seemed Staines had to wilt, but they withstood the barrage and after Hollifield had lifted a shot over the bar, the home side took a shock lead with their first real attack of the half. The goal came from a free kick which Billy Salkeld sent deep into the box. John Maskell came out, missed his attempted punch and Peter Osbourne, signed only that afternoon from Dover where he was top goalscorer for two years, crowned his debut by heading home.

Wycombe's reply was instant. Fraser had the ball near the corner flag and tried to cross. His first effort was blocked, but he sent over the rebound to the near post where Kennedy stopped to head on. Kettleborough lunged to send a firm header past Parsons and into the net for a thoroughly deserved equaliser.

Still Wanderers pressed forward with dangerous raids that kept Staines back pedalling. But again the clear-cut chance just would not come although John Love almost leant a hand with a header following a corner.

Staines began to get back into the game towards the end and Maskell did well to get down to Salkeld's powerful ground shot after 81 minutes.

Two minutes later Wanderers were robbed again by the woodwork when Kennedy sent in a header that looped over Parsons but came back off the crossbar. The Blues must have known this wasn't their night. There were two more chances for a winner when Kennedy screwed a good shooting chance wide and Hollifield saw his drive deflected for a corner.

STAINES: F. Parsons; P. Shaw, R. Williams, T. McCready, B. O'Sullivan; P. Cruse (sub. A. Rowlands 80 mins); J. Love, W. Salkeld; R. Osbourne, E. James, J. Ritchie.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies; H. Kennedy, G. Fraser, M. Hollifield; I. Pearson, H. Kettleborough, D. Evans. Sub D. Bullock (not used).

Referee: G. Gordon (Raynes Park).
Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorers:** Staines — Osbourne (65). Wycombe — Kettleborough (67).